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ON THE TRAIL OF THE TATZELWURM

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and Kim Parkhurst

Mystery giant spiders . Strange fossils . UFOs and The Rapture . The Tatzelwurm . Irish Wild Cat . A hoax prehistoric trilobite in Brunei . Birds with two heads. Are some mystery black cats really black foxes? . More!

FLYING SNAKE SUBSCRIPTION AND GUIDELINES

ESTABLISHED BY RICHARD MUIRHEAD AKA DR DEVO IN 2011

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Dr Devo`s Diary

“ For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the beavers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames.” Christopher Smart ` `Rejoice in the Lamb

First of all , welcome to another issue of Flying Snake, I hope you all got through the Christmas and New Year season without too many coughs, colds and the dreaded Covid. As for myself I have been suffering from a prolonged cough and cold for weeks; I hope now that warmer weather is here it will rapidly diminish. I would like to start this issue by paying a heart felt tribute to Richard George. Although he hasn`t contributed to this issue , he sent me a long letter at the end of December describing in great honesty and humour the tragic ailments and crises that had caused him to become a patient in Watford General Hospital for at least two months. I was astonished at his positive attitude which put me to shame. I don`t think I could “keep my chin up” in similar circumstances and I wish him a full recovery. If you are reading this Richard, welcome back to Flying Snake! In this issue I have a wide range of topics for you , If the rapture hasn`t happened between now at the end of January and whenever this issue goes to print, (because I will not be around to finish this issue) I present Roswell, Israel, The Rapture and UFOs. I also offer for the first time a piece by Lana Thilo on the identity of large birds of prey reported from New Zealand. You will also notice that there are major reports on the Tatzelwurm of the alpine regions of central Europe. This is because myself and Ulrich Magin were seriously considering visiting Alpbach in Austria to look for this cryptid in September 2024 but then decided to cancel our plans because the Tatzelwurm is almost certainly extinct. This is rather sad because my dad died in Alpbach in 1993. I finally want to thank my sister-in-law for passing on the information about black cats and black foxes. Enjoy FS # 28!

SHUKER NATURE BLOG

LOUISIANA`S GIANT SPIDERS-AN INDEPENDENT EYEWITNESS AT LAST!

October 13th 2023

A giant spider model owned by longstanding friend and fellow cryptozoology enthusiast Mike Playfair (© Michael Playfair)

In a trio of detailed ShukerNature blog articles posted by me during summer 2020 and spring 2021... I documented the fascinating if exceedingly startling series of claims that had been emailed to me by a United States soldier concerning the supposed presence of enormous spiders seen by him and others on several occasions during 2005 and 2007 at US army training areas at Fort Polk, Louisiana's Joint Readiness Training Center, where for several weeks back then he'd been stationed for complex field training.

As I discussed in my accounts, however, the fundamental physiological problems of such sizeable spiders even being *capable* of existing, let alone actually *doing* so, would seem sufficient reasons in themselves for discounting these claims out of hand. Yet the extent of detail provided by this self-alleged eyewitness (I do have a name for him on file but in deference to his request to remain publicly anonymous I have never revealed it) is such that I felt it warranted published coverage, if only to see if it elicited any independent, corroborating reports from anyone else.

Now, finally, after more than two years, it has done so, and not from some stranger either, but instead from a longstanding friend on Facebook – namely, veteran monster/mystery beast fan Rich Janusz from Connecticut.

My own giant spider model (© Dr Karl Shuker)

On 10 July this year, Rich sent me three private messages in swift succession on Facebook, and gave me his full permission to document them in a future ShukerNature article – thanks Rich! Due to pressing work commitments, however, I wasn't able to do so straight away, but I am doing so now, having combined his three messages together into

continuous communication – so here it is: I have read over the years your reports of giant spiders in the Fort Polk area. I will give you my wife's brother's account.

My wife's brother is an MP in the CT NG. Some years ago, he went to Fort Polk for training. He was training on the use of night vision goggles. They heard a rustling noise, and he swears that himself and his friend saw a spider at least as big as a trash can cover crawl across the trail that they were watching. He is not a bs artist by any means. He has told me this story several times and I believe him.

Sorry that I can't be more specific about dates, call it 2011 or 2012.

At first her brother laughed and said that they were campfire stories. Later he said we'll talk later, [and] a few weeks later he told me the story. Since then he has told it among family and friends. Plus, what was his reaction to the incident? Him and his friend debated going back the way they came, and decided to continue, but very cautiously at first, and then they practically ran through the exercise.

As indeed I would have done had I encountered at close range at night a spider the size of a dustbin lid (my UK-English translation of trash can cover!).

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Giant spider sculpture in Ottawa, Canada (© Markus Bühler)

Needless to say, all of the issues of physiological improbability that I discussed previously in relation to my soldier correspondent's sightings claims apply equally here. Yet as I also noted previously, it is not inconceivable, surely, that some novel evolutionary advancement of the typical size-limiting spider respiratory system could yield spiders bigger than those presently known to science (though as there is currently no physical evidence of any kind to substantiate this, such a notion is presently wholly speculative).

Meanwhile, I'll be very interested to see whether this long-awaited, long-hoped-for first independent testimony to the putative reality of Fort Polk's reputed mega-spiders induces other reports of such creatures from this Louisiana location to emerge.

My thanks once again to Rich Janusz for so kindly permitting me to document his extremely interesting, thought-provoking information here.

Another view of my giant spider model (© Dr Karl Shuker)

8 COMMENTS:

TOM FROM KANSAS CITY

Dr. Shuker, could what the witnesses are seeing a variation of the coconut crab? If seen in the dark it could be mistaken for a giant crab

DR KARL SHUKER

However, the coconut crab doesn't live anywhere remotely near Louisiana, or anywhere else in or around North America.

SIMON

I also instantly thought not just of the coconut crab, but other crustaceans known to get as big as the Louisiana giant spiders are reported. Remember reading about a giant crab in the Sea of Japan which regularly grew to a similar size as well.

Ethan Azariah 20 October 2023

Odd, I thought I commented on this. Maybe the spam filter ate it because it was anonymous (name/url) and contained links. Anyway, the short version is that, as exciting as the thought of a new species is, I think it could be an escaped pet coconut crab. The area's climate may be suitable, being humid subtropical. The creatures take an exceptionally long time to grow to full size, so it could have escaped when it was much smaller, decades ago. (I think I'm doing a better job of writing this up than my original comment.)

Also, Fort Polk is now named Fort Jackson, though the attached village is still named Fort Polk on maps. Just something that came up as I searched.

I don't remember if I included my concern that it might not truly be an independent eyewitness account. The reason I was thinking that was that I had recently watched a video explaining that the naming of England's Pennine mountain range was a hoax. The story bore some resemblance to this one: reliance on communication from reputable people living far away. In that case, it was just one reputable person who we now know to have had ideas about fooling people. William Stukely, who was fooled into publishing and promoted the ideas of this liar, asked around and found him to be a man of sound mind but didn't check beyond that. Anyway, the purpose of cryptozoology is to sift these things, so my concern could be put down to my anxiety issues and lack of of metaphorical balance. The video is on the Youtube channel of Paul and Rebecca Whitewick, and is named The Greatest Roman Hoax - That Fooled EVERYONE. Perhaps I should add that the Whitewicks don't claim to be experts. They do research but achknowlege that they're not scientists.

Anonymous 14 October 2023

The point that I was attempting to speculate upon was that since the coconut crab, as an invertebrate, has been able to adapt to a terrestrial lifestyle it should be considered that another invertebrate could undergo a parallel evolution to allow a more active/efficient respiration system.

Richard Muirhead 16 October 2023

In my magazine Flying Snake volume 2 issue 6 November 2013 I report on two newspaper reports on giant spiders in a cave a short distance from Buena Vista in Colorado. The spiders were described as being the size of small birds with the fibre of their website being ten times as ones woven by ordinary spiders. The newspapers were the Ohio Daily Star May 8th 1880 and the Indiana Daily Democrat June 1st 1901. I also came across a Google Earth image of a giant spiders web in Colorado.

Anonymous 29 October 2023

While I believe in the possibility of a giant spider; I don't buy this story. As I said in the previous updates, the experiencer knows the military, but there are little details in their account that lead me to believe that they are not actual military. I also brought up that if there were such a thing that it would also be sighted in the near by civilian community. Either by hunters, or farmers, or commuters in the area.
As for the coconut crab theory, I find it preposterous. For one, it looks nothing like a spider other than having multiple legs. Secondly, as far as I know, coconut crabs don't live under ground or have fangs.
As for the possibility of a real giant spider, I don't see why not. Through evolution they could have developed stronger book lungs or developed another method for taking in oxygen. After all, ancient species of insect life were able to grow to giant proportions.

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Anonymous 2 November 2023

I have a friend from Louisiana who was in the forces for a while and had a lot of friends stationed at fort Polk. He said he had never heard of any stories like that and thought it seemed fake, one quote from him "fort Polk is bad enough doesn't need giant spiders"

Three Small Tennessee Mysteries
by Kate Shaw

Over a century ago, in March 1919, on a farm outside of what is now Hartsville, Tennessee, a man named Robert Carter was having trouble with his chickens being killed by wild animals. He saw a hawk take one of the hens and set a trap, which caught the hawk, but he was still losing hens. Carter put the bodies of the hawk and a dead hen on the ground and set three traps around them. In the morning, an animal he didn't recognize was caught in one of the traps. Old newspaper accounts have always been frustrating for researchers of strange animals because they rarely give much of a description. The Jackson County Sentinel described the animal as "grizzly-brown" in color and as weighing 15 to 20 pounds. That's about 7 to 9 kilograms. It also reports that Carter said the animal had protruding eyes that were "set slanting in the head." However, the article also says that the animal was probably a wildcat or catamount. In late November of the same year, 1919, Robert Carter made the news again when his dogs treed another strange animal. The article calls this animal a wildcat or bobcat, and describes it as almost three feet long, or 90 centimeters, "two or three times as large as an ordinary house cat, and of a brownish-gray color." It mentions Carter's earlier discovery of the animal in the trap and also mentions that Carter had shot several more of the animals in the area at different times. It seems likely that Robert Carter was decimating the local bobcat population. The bobcat lives throughout most of North America and is gray-brown in coloration, with darker spots and streaks. Its face and ears resemble a domestic tabby cat's but with a distinctive tip of black fur on each ear. It gets its name because its tail is short, or bobbed. The reported size and weight of the animals killed by Robert Carter are well within the known limits of the bobcat's size. If. we had a better description or a photograph, or if Carter had saved the skins of the animals he killed,

we would know for sure, but a bobcat is a good candidate. Thirty years earlier and not too far away, in eastern Nashville, Tennessee, a much different type of strange animal was heard and seen in a storm sewer. The sewer was part of a system to drain rainwater from the roads and funnel it into the nearby Cumberland River. It wasn't big enough for a person to stand up in even when it was empty of water, but it was shady and cool in summer when the river was low and rain was intermittent.

Local children used to enter the sewer at such times, walking doubled over, and follow it a few blocks to a manhole on Sixth Street where they could climb out. Apparently this wasn't a problem with anyone, from city officials to parents.

The sewer continued past the Sixth Street manhole, and one day in mid-August 1889 a group of small boys decided to explore farther. They came rushing back in terror soon after, reporting that they'd come across a huge animal in the darkness that bellowed at them.

Some older boys entered the sewer again and determined that the bellowing monster wasn't a monster at all but a cow in distress. For some reason known only to the cow, she had entered the sewer from the riverside although she had to crawl into it on her knees. Because she was then unable to turn around, she kept crawling until she reached a part of the sewer where the ceiling sloped downward until it was too small for her. The boys told their fathers, who went to look. Sure enough, they found the cow.

The boys helped drag the cow back to the manhole, where they were able to bring food and water down to her. In the meantime, the adults found the cow's owner, who had been searching for her for a week. He never considered she might have crawled into a sewer opening barely more than a meter in diameter.

Part of the sewer was dismantled in order to hoist the cow out, but un-

-fortunately she was weakened and injured from over a week trapped in the sewer. The newspaper reported on August 16, 1889 that she was shot to end her suffering. I wish I could report that a grate was placed over the sewer entrance to stop cows and children from getting in, but this doesn't seem to have happened.

In the mid to late 20th century, an urban legend circulated for decades about alligators living in the sewers of New York City. Maybe they were eating cows they found down there. In early October of 1937, again in Nashville, a woman encountered a reptile in her cellar that at least one newspaper called an alligator. It was about two feet long, or 60 centimeters, and its presence explained the disappearance of the goldfish in the woman's lily pond. The Nashville Banner said on October 8, 1937 that Mrs. McIntosh had found a "scaly animal resembling an alligator" in her cellar the previous day. On October 9, The Tennessean wrote that "the two-foot alligator appeared in the basement of her home Friday and then proceeded to go to her lily pond to devour her goldfish. The alligator was captured by Mrs. McIntosh and put in a box for safe-keeping."

I couldn't find out what happened to the alligator, or if it even was an alligator. Alligators aren't native to Tennessee, but it's certainly possible that someone had visited the coast and brought back a baby gator as a pet. Baby alligators were sold to tourists as late as 1967, when the American alligator was declared a protected species, but the practice started well before the turn of the 20th century. The sewer alligator story arose after reports of people flushing unwanted pet gators down the toilet in New York City, but in more rural areas, it was easier to just dump the animal outside. However, there's no way to know if Mrs. McIntosh's goldfish were eaten by an alligator or some other reptile.

Sources:

"Strange Animal Killed." (1919, March 13). Jackson County (Tennessee) Sentinel, p. 4

"Wildcat Killed in Trousdale." (1919, November 30). Nashville (Tennessee) Banner, p. 11

"Unorthodox Animal Eats Woman's Goldfish." (1937, October 8). Nashville (Tennessee) Banner, p. 1

"It May Be Warfare Out on Granny White Pike." (1937, October 9). The Tennessean, p. 12

On the Identity of Large Birds of Prey Reported in New Zealand Part 1

Lana Thilo

Investigations into sightings of giant birds of prey have become a mainstay in modern cryptozoology. Reports of large raptors in North America have enthralled many, resulting in hundreds of hour's worth of research; but these encounters are by no means restricted to the New World. Across history, sightings have been documented from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and many places in between - arguably the most credible of which come from Te Waipounamu or South Island, New Zealand.

Te Waipounamu was a bustling place during the late 1800's; the first European colonies were set up on the island, which attracted many naturalists and explorers looking to better understand this new world. Two such naturalists reported seeing large birds in the alpine regions of the island - Julius von Haast and Charlie Douglas. Haast and Douglas were immensely important to the modern understanding of New Zealand; both are now honored by having several locations and native animals named after them.

Haast had several sightings of large raptors on South Island during the 1860's, reproduced below in full:

(From "Exploration of the Head Waters of the Waitaki, 1862")

"The most interesting inhabitant of these Alpine regions is a very large bird of prey, with crepuscular and nocturnal habits, which visited our camp, first on the evening of April the 6th, when we were sitting round the fire. For a short time previously we heard the flapping of its wings, which became every second more audible. For a moment it sat down close to us, but before we could reach the gun, it rose and disappeared. I can only compare its flight with that of the New Zealand Harrier, and as far as we could estimate its size, it appeared to be as large as a good sized eagle. On the evening of the 8th, when occupied with the

good sized eagle. On the evening of the 8th, when occupied with the writing of my journal by candle light, the same bird flew against the tent with considerable force, and then settled on the ground at no great distance from it. A chance shot had, however, not the desired effect. As will be seen during the page 38 progress of my narrative, I met this large raptorial bird several times more, without however being fortunate enough to secure a specimen, and I must therefore leave it to future explorers of these Alpine regions, and to more fortunate circumstances, to obtain this rara avis."

(From "Journey to the Head-waters of the Rakaia – 1866")

"When afterwards ascending the eastern slopes of Mount Harman, a large bird of prey passed within a few hundred yards of us; its large size, more pointed wings, and dark colour distinguished it at once from the New Zealand Harrier (Circus Gouldii), so common on our plains, but which I never observed in the alpine regions. Mr A. J. Mathias, my companion during this trip, had never seen it before, although he had lived several years in the upper valley of the Rakaia, and during that time he had closely observed the birds of that region, neither had the late F. L. Fuller, the taxidermist at the time attached to our Museum, who had collected New Zealand birds for several years, and knew well their peculiarities. We observed the same species (Eagle hawk?) once more next morning, when returning to Goat Hill, above the junction of the Stewart with the Wilberforce, when it was pursuing a sparrow hawk, and flying very high above us. In the evening we reached the hut, after having obtained, during the descent, another set of observations at different points."

Douglas apparently shot and ate two large raptors during the 1870's or 1880's:

(From "Mr. Explorer Douglas" by John Pascoe)

"The expanse of wing of this bird will scarcely be believed. I shot two on the Haast, one was 8 feet 4 inches (2.54 m) from tip to tip, the other was 6 feet 9 inches (2.06 m), but with all their expanse of wing they

have very little lifting power, as a large hawk can only lift a duck for a few feet, so no one need get up any of those legends about birds carrying babies out of cradles, as
the eagle is accused of doing."

The fact that these sightings came from such respected naturalists makes them not only more credible but more notable (both men were well respected reporters, and didn't seek any sort of acknowledgement for their reports of large birds[1]). These aspects are further bolstered by the fact that raptors of similar scale were present on South Island only a few hundred years earlier.

The most impressive of South Island's giant raptors was Haast's eagle - one of the largest, and certainly the heaviest, birds of prey to ever live. Many who have looked at these cases previously (such as Darren Naish[2], Trevor Worthy[1], and Richard Holdaway[1]) have suggested that the birds sighted during the 1800's were the last representatives of Haast's Eagle, but I find this to be incredibly unlikely. Simply, Haast's eagle would've been driven to extinction by the native Maori hundreds of years before Europeans set foot in New Zealand. Haast's eagle (*Hieraaetus moorei*) was a large insular species of hawk-eagle, acting as the top predator of its region. It fed on the large terrestrial birds present on South Island, some of which stood several meters tall. Haast's eagle evolved a number of traits in order to hunt these large terrestrial birds; its large size and weight allowed it to knock into and overpower prey, short but broad wings let it maneuver through forests to seek out food, and even its method of feeding had changed to better suit its new diet - it plunged its head into carcasses and extracted vital organs rather than ripping and swallowing like most other birds of prey[3]. Haast's eagle relied on larger terrestrial birds as its main food source, so much so that other raptors were able to fill the niche of small, generalist hunter.

The terrestrial birds it fed on were unique in their own right; the New Zealand Swan was an insular giant trending towards flightlessness, while the largest of South Island's moas stood taller than most people. Smaller flightless birds like adzebills, takahes, kakapo, and kiwi might be less physically impressive but they evolved a number of traits that helped protect them from the eagle, such as burrowing and defensive foot spurs.

If those birds were still present on South Island during the late 1800's, the survival of Haast's eagle wouldn't be a problem – but they weren't, or at least not in sustainable quantities. The New Zealand Swan and the adzebills were hunted to extinction by the time the first Europeans arrived in the 1600's. The South Island Takahe's numbers declined exponentially, it was even feared extinct for around 50 years until it was rediscovered in 1948. South Island's kiwi populations didn't fare much better and fluctuated heavily, their modern rebound is due to consistent conservation efforts. Kakapo numbers are still quite low, even despite conservationist's best attempts. The population of ground birds in the area where Charlie Douglas had his sighting were completely gone within a few years[1], many other areas became vacant around that same time.

The moas, which likely represented a major portion of the eagle's diet, were almost certainly hunted to extinction before the first Europeans arrived in the 1600's. While this has been a point of contention, as some sightings from the 17th and 18th century might represent the last moas[1], the survival of moas doesn't lend any credence to the survival of Haast's Eagle since the eagles almost certainly faced other factors that contributed to their extinction independent of the moa's persistence.

When the Maori arrived in New Zealand they brought dogs and rodents with them for food. Some managed to escape, which proved to be disastrous for Te Waipounamu's fragile insular ecosystems. Dogs killed and ate many adult ground birds while rats targeted eggs and young; disrupting and impeding the already slow and arduous breeding cycle of many insular species. These animals also carried diseases and parasites unfamiliar to the native animals, something that crippled the ground birds (and the Haast's eagles that fed on them) even more.

Humans were the most devastating of the new inhabitants; they burnt and slashed large areas of land and hunted many species of bird to extinction within only 150 years of their arrival. In an immensely short period of time they permanently altered the ecosystem, something which many animals couldn't keep up with. Haast's eagle likely had a quite low population – one study suggests no more than 3,000 to 4,500[4] breeding pair, while others have suggested less than 1,000 pairs[5]. The combination of illness, competition, and lack of resources

would've whittled the birds' numbers down further every year.

The last eagles would've been under immense stress, driven closer together to find food. Intraspecific combat likely would've been more common; while fatalities in such events are rare in modern birds of prey, repeated interactions could've certainly maimed or killed a portion of the population. Birds of prey don't do well when encroached upon, many eagles abandon their nests when their territory is disturbed; something especially prevalent in first time parents[6]. These birds also likely nested on the ground, leaving their eggs and young accessible to rats. The number of chicks successfully making it to adolescence would've been slim; Haast's eagle was doomed.

Consensus in the scientific community is that Haast's eagle went extinct either alongside the many terrestrial birds it fed on, or even before its prey was wiped out. In recent years, studies have been used to test the extinction date of several species proposed to have a late survival, notably the dodo[7] and thylacine[8]. While one has yet to be published on Haast's eagle, when looking at the dodo specifically (which is used as a point of comparison here due to it being an insular bird that faced heavy competition with humans and the animals they brought), the latest possible extinction date is a century after the last reliable sighting. Applying this same logic to Haast's eagle, it would've gone extinct during the 16th or 17th century, almost 200 years before either Haast's or Douglas' sightings took place.

The Maori themselves have even emphasized that giant birds of prey are a distant memory. They knew Haast's eagle by many names, such as the *pouakai* and *hokioi*, but all stories note that the birds are now extinct, either wiped out by their ancestors of having simply disappeared with the passage of time[9]. If not Haast's eagle, then what did the two explorers see?

Mystery Giant Spiders of the World

Shane Lea and Richard Muirhead

Arachnophobes look away now! Hello again Flying Snake readers, cryptozoologists and other assorted humans, we are here bringing you another research feature, this time the subject being mystery giant spiders of the world. We are deliberately using this phrase "mystery giant spiders" rather than simply "giant spiders" because of course there are many "giant spiders" in the world. A "giant" does not make a spider a cryptid. What we are looking at in this essay are cryptids and very large known species. The word " mystery" we suggest proposes something more unusual, tantalising, unexpected but we are not straying into areas of the paranormal. Apart from the fossil record and films, all the spiders in this essay are flesh and blood animals, if they really exist. Also with an animal like a spider ,there is a very high possibility that giant spiders await discovery in the dense jungles of places like Brazil, Vietnam or central Africa. Indeed some of the cryptid monster spiders in this essay hail from some of those countries. According to a quick Google search, there is no one measurement in centimetres or inches that defines "giant." **THE FOSSIL RECORD**

On September 27th 2023 the BBC Newsround web site reported under the headline `Fossil of a `giant` Trapdoor spider found in Australia` as follows: " The fossil is between 11 to 16 million-years-old and was found in the centre of Australia in a very dry region of New South Wales, called McGraths Flat. (1) On October 4th 2023 this was elaborated upon as reported by the NDTV Australia web site thus: "We all try to avoid things that make us feel uncomfortable. And spiders are right on top in this list. But latest discovery in Australia is set to make people more uncomfortable. A prehistoric version of the eight-legged arthropod has been discovered in the form of fossil in New South Wales. The spider is a giant trapdoor, and only the fourth

specimen of its kind to be found in the country. According to Australian Museum, the fossil spider has been named Megamonodontium mccluskyi." (2) According to Wikipedia, regarding a creature called Megarachne servinei: " With an estimated length of 33.9 cm (13.3 in) based on the assumption that the fossil was of a spider, and a legspan estimated to be 50 centimetres (20 in), *Megarachne servinei* would have been the largest spider to have ever existed, exceeding the goliath birdeater (*Theraphosa blondi*) which has a maximum legspan of around 30 cm (12 in). Because of its status as the "largest spider to have ever lived", *Megarachne* quickly became popular. Based on Hünicken's detailed description of the fossil specimen and various other illustrations and reconstructions made by him, reconstructions of *Megarachne* as a giant spider were set up in museums around the world. " (3)

According to a post on Reddit by u/Mongo_Skruddgemire on January 8th 2024: " The problem with these sightings [of monster spiders] is that there is a real scientific reason why they cannot exist today. There were giant Mesothelae spiders living back around 300 Million Years Ago but since spiders and other insects [sic– A spider is actually an arachnid] do not breath like animals do today , they have no way of getting oxygen other than through passive means. This limits their size based on the oxygen that is in the air. Back then, O2 levels were at 35%. This could support a huge spider. Today`s 21%...the current examples of Mesothelae (tarantulas and similar critters) are as big as they can get. So unless those spiders evolved an actual set of pumping lungs (at which case are they still even spiders?) they`re not going to exist. (4)

PHYSIOLOGICAL SIZE LIMITATIONS So, could immense spiders truly exist? Other than Leesville and Nottingham, Louisiana, the areas where they have been reported are all sufficiently impenetrable, inhospitable, and little-explored to be potentially capable of hiding some notable zoological surprises.

However, the fundamental problem when considering giant spiders is not one of zoogeography but rather one of physiology. Their tracheal respiratory system (consisting of a network of minute tubes carrying oxygen to every cell in the body) prevents spiders from attaining huge sizes in the modern world, because the tracheae could not transport oxygen efficiently enough inside spiders of giant stature. During the late Carboniferous and early Permian Periods, 300 million years ago, huge dragonflies existed, but back in those primeval ages the atmosphere's oxygen level was far greater than it is today, thereby compensating for the tracheal system's inefficiency. Moreover, until quite recently prehistory offered a truly spectacular, fully-confirmed super-spider too - the aptly dubbed Megarachne servinei, formally described in 1980 from a 300-million-year old Upper Carboniferous fossil specimen discovered by Argentine palaeontologist Mario Hünicken in the Bajo de Veliz Formation at San Luis, Argentina. Its body measured roughly 16 in long, and is estimated to have possessed a leg span of some 20 in. In 2005, conversely, the identity of Megarachne as a mega-spider was challenged in a Biology Letters of the Royal Society paper by Manchester University zoologist Dr Paul Selden and Hünicken, who proposed that it had actually been a very different chelicerate creature – not a spider but rather a sea scorpion or eurypterid. This identity has since been confirmed.

UNITED STATES, MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Having said that, huge spiders do occur around the world, including in the United States, Mexico and Central America. Karl Shuker in his blog `Louisiana`s giant spiders-an independent eye witness at last!` October 13th 2023 (see this issue of Flying Snake) outlines the stories from that state so we will not repeat them here suffice to say the evidence is somewhat slim. More intriguing is the image of a giant spider`s web on the ground in Colorado which I mention in my comment on the October 13th 2023 blog.

In my magazine Flying Snake volume 2 issue 6 November 2013 I report on two newspaper reports on giant spiders in a cave a short

distance from Buena Vista in Colorado. The spiders were described as being the size of small birds with the fibre of their website being ten times as ones woven by ordinary spiders. The newspapers were the Ohio Daily Star May 8th 1880 and the Indiana Daily Democrat June 1st 1901. I also came across a Google Earth image of a giant spiders web in Colorado. (5)

From Mexico comes an intriguing story of giant tarantulas crossing a road. In the 1950s, according to a post on Facebook in early January 2024 tarantulas the size of chickens were seen in a multitude crossing a road. They were estimated to be the size of chickens and I (Richard Muirhead) would say a chicken is 8-10 inches long from tip of back end to tip of beak. So that`s a pretty big arachnid.

In Honduras a soldier of fortune or mercenary called Jim Graves was wounded by a "monster spider", according to Soldier of Fortune magazine April 1984. Mercenaries are still active in Honduras today. According to the Pets on mom.com web site `Spiders of Honduras` by Jullana Wells-Roessler: "While tarantulas are the biggest spider found in Honduras, they are not particularly dangerous to humans. Some people even keep them as pets. The hair on their body gives them a "fuzzy" look, and they are usually dark brown with lighter brown or orange highlights. They are found in the rainforests of Honduras and Costa Rica and prefer living in burrows in a warm environment. They are frequently bred in captivity but are becoming fairly scarce in the wild due to a loss of habitat. " (6). The intriguing thing is Wells-Roessler describes these tarantulas as "not particularly dangerous to humans" so what was the mercenary`s mystery spider?

SOUTH AMERICA

There are stories of anomalous giant spiders in the Brazilian Amazon. According to a story in `Fifteen thousand miles on the Amazon and its tributaries` by C.B.Brown (1878) referring to an incident in Faro (a settlement in northern Brazil near the Amazon) : " A spider was caught (the biggest we had ever seen or heard of…) it covered, when standing, in its usual position, a space ten inches long, by eight inches

wide, but could be stretched to a total length of eleven and a half inches. Its body measured two and a half inches in length by one inch across the thorax.

The largest known spider in northern Brazil is the Goliath birdeater, according to Wikipedia: "These spiders can have a leg span of up to 30 cm (12 in), a body length of up to 13 cm (5.1 in), and can weigh up to 175 g (6.2 oz). Birdeaters are one of the few tarantula species that lack tibial spurs, located on the first pair of legs of most adult males. They are mostly tan to light brown and golden-hued…" (7)

Reports of comparably massive spiders have also been recorded from the rainforests of Venezuela in South America. In 2008, the American television series 'Monster Quest' sent tarantula expert Rick C. West to investigate such stories in the field via a short, filmed expedition to some Venezuelan jungle villages near to the Orinoco River and the border with Colombia. During his three-day foray, he was accompanied by a team of local helpers and an experienced Amazon guide, Juan Carlos Ramirez, who has worked here for over 20 years. (8)

Left: Largest spider in Venezuela: Wikipedia: female - Dorsal side - 23,5 cm - Mounted specimen by Philippe Annoyer

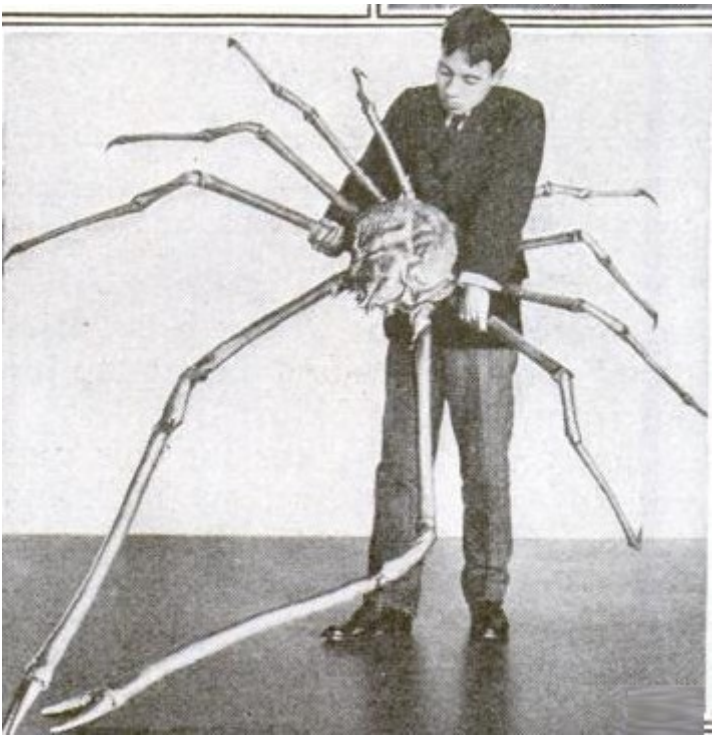
ASIA

The most extraordinary giant spider we have come across is a case from Japan from 1908. According to the Connellsville Daily Courier of September 5th 1908 (this was a Pennsylvania newspaper) " At the beginning of September a forest man called Yendo living in Kawalt village, Mimasaka province found a monster spider with the trunk of more than one foot in diameter and on full extent thirty feet square. He was much scared and resulted in a fever. "

The Japanese spider crab, whilst not being an arachnid and therefore beyond the scope of this essay, is very impressive to look at. "The Japanese spider crab has the greatest leg span of any known arthropod, reaching up to 3.7 m (12.1 ft) from claw to claw. The body may grow to 40 cm (16 in) in carapace width and the whole crab can weigh up to 19 kg (42 lb)—second in mass only to the American lobster among all living arthropod species. " (9) The image on page 28 was provided by Shane Lea.

"On 8 April 2013, American cryptozoologist Craig Woolheater posted on the Cryptomundo website a fascinating communication that he'd lately received from an American correspondent publicly identified only by their Cryptomundo user name, mrmaxima. This person stated that their father-in-law claims that while serving in the jungles of Vietnam during the Vietnam War as part of a five-man unit conducting scout work there, he encountered spiders with bodies the size of dinner plates, and, with their legs, yielding a total span of 20-30 in. These terrifying arachnids were always spied near to creeks or other water sources, and were so tough that even after being shot by him and the other men with their M16s and unloaded full magazines, they were still moving around."(10)

In Laos there are giant cave huntsman spiders which have a 12 inch leg span.



Wikimedia Commons. Japanese spider crab. Popular Science Magazine, Jun. 1920:

In the book Warriors of Old Japan: and other stories by Yei Theodora Ozaki and Hugh Fraser (1909) a legendary story is told of a “goblin spider” A man called Raiko had a sword known as the spider-cutting sword because it mortally wounded a huge spider in a cave.

AUSTRALASIA

In Papua New Guinea between July 1942 and January 1943 the father of one of Australian cryptozoologist Debbie Hynes`s friends saw a giant spider the size of a “small dog or puppy” on a track called the Kokoda Track (or Trail.)

“ One day he had to take himself off into the scrub in answer to a call of nature. While thus engaged he noticed he was crouched down next to a very large cobweb - not the classic "fishing-net" sort but the fine, snow-white cottony stuff that spread all over the ground and tree trunk etc. His eye followed it one way and then the other - seems it was very extensive, like 10 to 15 ft either way. Then he noticed the spider itself, only a foot or so away from his face. It was a real horror - the body, i.e. thorax+abdomen, he described as the "size of a small dog or puppy", it was coloured jet black, the legs were thick and hairy but not as long as the classic "dinner plate tarantula" type spider that owes its size to the spread of its legs. This thing had more body bulk than spread. Needless to say he backed out of there *very* slowly and carefully." (11) Outsize spiders are found in Australia. According to posts on Facebook on January 5th 2024 a spider named Hercules with a leg span of 7.9cm which was the biggest ever male funnel-web spider ever discovered was donated to the Australian Reptile Park.

AFRICA

The main huge spider cryptid in Africa is the j`ba fofi of the Congo. According to the Baka pygmy tribe and the Bantu hunters these spiders look like a large monkey or small human. The veteran cryptozoologist Bill Gibbons related an account to Dr Karl Shuker passed onto Gibbons by Margaret M. Lloyd whose parents were exploring what was once the Belgian Congo. They saw one of these huge spiders from their car “ and were amazed to discover that it was a huge brown tarantula-like spider , with a leg length close to 3ft (90cm)! “ (12) According to Timbo, chief of the local Baka pygmy tribe: “They were once much more common than they are now, their decreased numbers probably due to deforestation in this area of Central Africa, and would build lairs close to human villages. Their lairs were constructed from leaves and resembled the huts of the pygmies...The j`ba fofi lay white eggs the size of peanuts, from which emerge

immature yellow spiders with purple abdomens, but they turn brown as they mature…" (13) Officially the largest spider in Africa is possibly the King baboon spider (Pelinobius muticus) , they can have a leg span of 8 inches or 20 cm, see image below.

Wikipedia Commons. Pelinobius muticus
www.universoaracnido.com

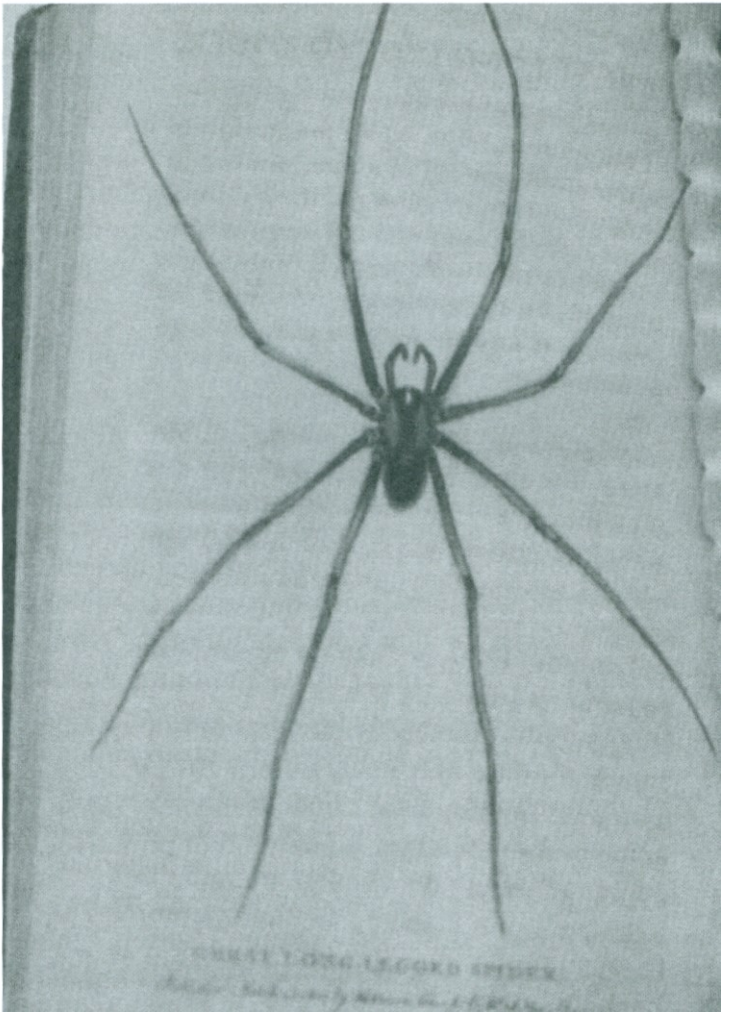
EUROPE

There are several cases of giant spiders in the United Kingdom. In August 1714 a giant black spider`s web appeared in the summer house of a cooper living in Baldwin Street in Bristol: " As the cooper and his party entered the pavilion they found an enormous black cobweb, 34ft wide. He swore that it had been swept clean just a few days previously, and many people saw it as a terrible omen of doom connected with King and regime...But what of the spider that could make a 34ft web? There was never any sighting of it. You might not expect any reports though; anyone who had seen it would have died of fright. (14)

Another giant spider turned up in Drury Lane, London in 1798, see

image below from The Naturalist`s Pocket Magazine (1800) volume 5. It measured 5 1/2 inches from point to point, 5/8 inch long and 2/8 inch broad. (15)

LARGE SPIDER IN LONDON 1798



Shane adds: Giant spiders are the stuff of terror, and horror movies. Average-sized-spiders can cause trepidation and panic, but could extra -large, extraordinary spiders lurk in different parts of the world? There are actually cryptid reports that suggest the possibility of giant spiders beyond the accepted, scientific size-limits, really existing, to our astonishment.

I myself, encountered a very large specimen of arachnid, in my own bedroom, perched above the headboard of my bed, facing directly down toward where my head would be! I'm sure that the spider meant no harm, but it was a little un-nerving. The spider was a native species, native to the U. S., a North Carolina Wolf Spider, but with a leg-span that I estimated at 5 inches. This spider look

To the right: Photo by Shane of an U.S.North Carolina Wolf Spider.

ed huge! The maximum size-range for this species is supposed to be about 3 inches. If you think that a 5-inch-spider is no big deal, think about a 5-inch-spider with large fangs, perched down at your bloody head! This spider was just a few inches above my bed, so I decided to relocate him (or her) to the outside, even though it was December 2020, and I'm sure that it was looking for a place to over-winter. So, I donned leather gloves, captured it without harming it and relocated it back outside. It did leave a very visible amount of bright, yellow venom on my

gloves as a reminder of our encounter!
Some years prior to my own spider encounter, my father bent down to pick up what he thought was a leaf on the carpet-floor of his house, about 2 A.M. The "leaf" moved! To his shock, my father saw that the leaf was instead a spider that was bigger than his hand! He estimated that it had a 7-8 inch leg-span. Not wasting time, he promptly dispatched it with a shoe. His opinion was that maybe it came in (to the U. S.), on a banana-crate. Since he discarded the body, we'll never know.
The point here is, that one may encounter out-sized specimens of large arachnids in their own backyard! These episodes illustrate the potential of even larger arachnids, new to science, yet to be discovered, throughout the world.
Colonel P. H. Fawcett, explorer extraordinaire, of lost cities and giant snakes fame, related a bizarre tale from the early twentieth century, in his fascinating book, Exploration Fawcett. Along the Mapiri Trail, which runs through the Andes region of Bolivia, there were intermittent posadas (inns), for wayward travellers to stay overnight in, on their journey along this mountain trail. In one particular posada, close to the interaction of fringes of rain forest, with the Mapiri Trail, there were a number of unexplainable deaths, where patrons were found deceased, with a palor of a strange, black discolouration. Some type of foul play was the chief suspect in these strange deaths. When authorities investigated the situation, they found that a huge, black, tarantula-like-spider, called Apazauca, was living in the thatched roof of this particular inn. Apparently, this giant spider, the size of a dinner-plate, would gruesomely descend down on sleeping guests at night, to inject them lethally with a very potent type of venom! Did this Apazauca Spider then injest bodily fluids from the unsuspecting victims? One can only guess, but it's a grim thought! This Apazauca spider, as Col. Fawcett called it, with it's black colouration, is similar to the Brazilian black tarantula (Grammostola pulchra), but at a leg-span of only 7 inches, the Brazilian black tarantula is hardly the size of a dinner-plate. The size of the Apazauca Spider rivals the largest known spider in the world, in terms of mass, the Goliath bird-eating spider (Theraphosa blondi), a tarantula, with a 12-inch-leg-span. Size alone,

probably constitutes the Apazauca as a potential new species of large tarantula. Then, the potent venom of the Apazauca is extremely virulent and more lethal than most tarantulas, if it can indeed take out human beings. Some tarantulas can and actually do, prey on animals as large as chickens, but human beings as prey items? Wow! Colonel Fawcett actually had a huge Apazauca Spider crawl on his body, as his party was encamped at the mouth of the Yalu River, in Bolivia. Fawcett felt something crawling on his arm, brushed it off finally, as it tenaciously clung to his body, before realising to his shock and horror what it was! Was Colonel Fawcett about to become another Apazauca victim? Who knows? 1

In Earth's distant past, there were many types of giant insect species, including giant dragon-flies, due to the oxygen-rich-atmosphere on Earth at that time, 300 million years ago, in the Carboniferous Era. The fossil record of the largest giant spider ever to have lived, from the Carboniferous Era of Argentina, (Megarachne servinei), that had a a leg-span of 20 inches, upon further study, sadly, turned out to be a eurypterid (sea-scorpion), instead. This would have been fossil evidence of giant spiders, if it had held up. For the most part, the fossil-record of giant spiders is poorly understood, due to spider bodies not being preserved as fossils very well. So, we really don't know exactly how large the very largest spiders became. The possibility remains, of exceptionally large, spider fossils, still to be discovered.

The physiology of spiders, is the one factor limiting their attaining huge sizes. Spiders have what are called "passive" or "inefficient" lungs, as far as their ability to deliver oxygen to body cells and maintain an active lifestyle. Some spiders even respire via book-lungs, which are even more primitive, book-like, lungs. Breathing via book-lungs, for arthropods and spiders, is thought by mainstream science to limit the oxygen-level necessary for very large specimens. Other factors come into play as far as size is concerned, even in spiders, such as environmental-conditions and diet. Living in the oxygen-rich -environment of a tropical rain forest, may have an effect, as well as larger, nutrient-rich prey items, like mammals.

Possibly, some species of spider may have developed a novel method of breathing, that enhances their ability to attain a more active lifestyle and hence, larger growth rates. Life finds a way!

Truly large spiders have been seen in Africa. While exploring the interior of what was then Rhodesia (now, Zimbabwe), in 1938, Reginald and Marguerite Lloyd, witnessed a massive, brown spider,

with a 3-foot-leg-span, cross the road, in front of their vehicle. A 3-foot-leg-span! Wow!
From Cameroon, there are reports of truly gigantic, human-sized-spiders, called the jaba fofi. These large, brown-coloured-spiders, known to the Baka pygmies of Cameroon, weave webs so large between trees, that they capture mammalian prey. They are also capable of killing humans. Again, spiders that prey on humans! Astonishing! Sometimes, the pygmies turn the tables and spear one of the jaba fofi's to death! It is a shame though, to think of such a marvelous example of nature, meeting such an un-dignified demise. The possibility of such large spiders living in our world today, although on the outer-fringes of Cryptozoology, remains an exciting avenue of exploration! 2
Searching for tarantula-sized-spiders that are potential unknown species, may not be quite as glamourous as seeking out larger cryptids, but it is just as important. When the I. S. C. (International Society Of Cryptozoology), was formed in 1982, there was much debate as to size-limitations when acknowledging cryptids as being worthy of further study. Bernard Heuvelmans, the president of the I. S. C., claimed that he was against size-restrictions on cryptids. Large or small, cryptids have some strange or bizarre quality about them and they are ALL interesting. That combined with the fact that they could be a potential new species, should be enough. All cryptids are worthy of study.
In my humble opinion, Cryptozoology should be a fully-funded and legitimate career. If governments want you to work your fingers to the bone, to an advanced old age, until one may retire, and pay taxes that are squandered, then why not fund careers, research and expeditions that may actually benefit mankind, the animal kingdom and the world?
Following up on potential leads is a great way to launch an expedition. One can do this locally or internationally. Of course, many logistics are often involved. We all owe a big THANK YOU to all the explorers, current and past, from Percy Fawcett on down, who risked life and limb to further our knowledge of the world. Often these pioneers in exploration used their own funds to carry out these missions of exploration.
Even searching for tarantula-sized-giant-spiders can be beneficial, because one may also include searches for other cryptids in the area, as well. One may even include crypto-botany, searching for hidden

plants. In some areas, new plants may still be found with potential benefits for mankind, including medicinal cures. All of this activity furthers our knowledge of who and what we are and the understanding of the world around us. If it wasn't for all the various crypto-explorers, we wouldn't have the knowledge that we now have, regarding cryptid species. This paranthetic, goes out to all of us like-minded-individuals, interested in cryptids, in the hope that expeditions in search of cryptids, discoveries of, and protection of cryptids, will continue. Long may expeditions continue to look for smaller-sized, "giant" spiders, truly giant spiders, and all other cryptids! The Great Days Of Zoology AND Cryptozoology Are Not Done! Not Even Close!

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Roswell, Israel, The Rapture and UFOs

Richard Muirhead

The Roswell incident, in which an UFO is alleged to have crashed near the Roswell Army Air Field some time between mid June and early July 1947, coincided with the visit of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine to meet with Palestinian and Zionist delegations. (see Wikipedia—History of Israel) The state of Israel was established on May 14th 1948 by David Ben-Gurion, the Executive Head of the World Zionist Organisation when the British mandate was due to expire at midnight on that day. These two incidents are held to be important pointers in the minds of some Christians to the Second coming

of Jesus Christ and certain elements of End Times prophecy. The Roswell incident marks the start of the modern fascination with UFOs/ UAPs . The establishment of the state of Israel marks the beginning of the contention around the status of Jerusalem. Should it be entirely held in Jewish hands? Should it be divided between Israel owning the West of Jerusalem and Palestinians owning the East? Or should Jerusalem be owned by the international community or the United Nations? The prophecy in Zechariah chapter 12 verses 2-3 says: " Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. " As I write this in mid December 2023 the war continues between Israel and Hamas in Gaza but the real bone of contention in the Middle East is the status of Jerusalem.

Believers in the Ancient Alien hypothesis suggest that two hundred of the Watchers (fallen angels) descended to Mount Hermon in Israel to help man evolve (or should that be devolve?) Mount Hermon (see page 44) is the highest point in Israel. Apparently Mount Hermon was sacred to the original Canaanite inhabitants of what is now Israel and the Hebrews. The Watchers are mentioned in the book of Enoch (1st Enoch chapter 6 verse 6) which is itself mentioned in Jude`s letter in the New Testament. "They swear upon the mountain that they would take wives among the daughters of men and take mutual imprecation for their sin (Enoch 6). " (1)

Several contemporary Christians suggest that when the Rapture happens the explanation for the mass disappearance of billions (there are approximately 2.5 billion Christians on the planet) of Christians from those in authority, such as political leaders and the United Nations, will be that these people will have been taken off this planet to another planet or dimension to be re-educated so that they are suitable to live in the New Age, New World Order or whatever it will be called after the mass appearance of UFOs or UAPs. When the rapture happens

so the hypothesis goes, UAPs will have been acknowledged by the powers that be to such an extent that it will be relatively easy to dupe the general public into believing that UAPs have abducted the missing. Rather than admitting that billions of Christians have been taken by God into heaven, they have instead been taken by UAPs into another world or dimension, perhaps to be returned to Earth at a later date once they have been re-educated. This bogus explanation will attempt to prevail over the mass panic that would ensue if no convincing explanation were to be given. Perhaps this "explanation" is the "powerful delusion" mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2 verses 11-12: "With every wicked deception directed against those who are perishing, because they refused the love of the truth that would have saved them. For this reason God will send them a power-

Snowy Mount Hermon as seen from Mt. Bental. By Almog

Wikipedia Creative Commons

ful delusion so that they believe the lie, in order that all will

be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."

There is growing chaos in the world; peoples and nations are in perplexity and distress because of the steadily growing number of crises and political and social chaos and turmoil. Day after day brings news of wars and rumours of wars (see Jesus`s discourse to his disciples whilst on the Mount of Olives in Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13 and Luke chapter 21.) In his book Chaos by Michael Snyder, he speculates that an UFO invasion, or an event that leads many to speculate about an UFO invasion may lead to the imposition by the powers that be of a New World Order.

On January 15th 2024 the Metro newspaper reported on the bogus alien corpses unveiled in 2023: " Two `alien mummies` found in the offices of courier DHL at Lima airport in Peru - dressed in traditional Andean attire - turned out to be...man - made dolls. They are similar to another pair of ` mummies` unveiled at a UFO conference , with MPs being told they were `proof of another living species.`(2) It turned out, according to archaeologist Flavio Estrada, that the "aliens" were actually"...dolls made from animal bones from this planet joined together with synthetic glue. It`s totally a made-up story`, he said." (3)

"You Gov data shows that half of Britons (50%) believe aliens exist, including a fifth (22%) who say they`ve been to Earth...One in fourteen Britons (7%) even believe they`ve seen an UFO themselves…" (4). Increases in the reporting of UFOs can be linked to world politics. On February 14th 2023 the Guardian online reported "Prepare for wave of extraterrestrial sightings in UK, say UFO experts` after four flying objects were shot down by US authorities: " Four flying objects of vastly different shapes and sizes, have been shot down by US authorities in less than two weeks and, while one is confirmed to be a Chinese balloon, authorities are in the dark on the other three. " (5)

Another bogus alien bodies story was the fake alien corpses from Roswell film footage that was featured in the world`s media in 1995. Photo above from Wikipedia from the 1995 film Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction.

But are UFOs actually extraterrestrial or do they come from within the Earth`s atmosphere? According to the essay ` Take Me To Your Leaders` by David Clarke in the January 2024 issue of Fortean Times, referring to the Condon Report by the University of Colorado in 1968: " It found no evidence that any UFO had ever posed a threat to national security and there was no evidence that any categorised as ` unidentified` were extraterrestrial spacecraft." (4) In 2011 : " The White House asked NASA to respond on its behalf (to a petition—Richard) and Phil Larson from the Office of Science and Technology said the US government possessed " no evidence that any life exists outside our planet or that an extraterrestrial presence has contacted or engaged any member of the human race. " (5) So perhaps the Bible is correct when it identifies aliens (i.e. demons) as inhabiting the "air" , that is the atmosphere above the Earth not another galaxy or universe. See Ephesians chapter 2 verse 2.

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Ulrich Magin
The variable dragon of the Alps – the tatzelwurm

In time past, dragons embodied powerful forces of nature, floods and landslides, as well as the dark forces of paganism. As civilization advanced, dragons seemed to recede. Belief in their real existence gradually died out almost everywhere – except for two particularly wild and inaccessible areas, the high mountains and the lakes of Europe. But while the Loch Ness monster continues to hit the headlines, things have now become very quiet about the tatzelwurm (the snake with feet), the mysterious monster of the Alps.

The earliest reports describe it as a typical dragon – a huge serpent with paws and the head of a big cat or dog, dangerous and spitting poison. As late as 1857, a chronicle from the canton of Bern warned of the "two sea monsters" in Lake Brienz. And another report adds that they had a hideous head with a dog's snout, two clawed feet, and were capable of capsizing boats.

What was a sea serpent in the water became a tatzelwurm on the shore. People most feared its terrible appearance and its poison, which killed just by looking at it. A monument from Salzburg showed Hans Fuchs from Unken, who died of fear in 1779 after encountering two "jumpworms," fat, pig-like, long-tongued giant lizards more than two meters in length.

With the tourist development of the mountains in the 19th century, the way of dealing with the tatzelwurm changed. Like the mountains, it lost something of its terror, if not its originality. In 1850, an eyewitness reported laconically that the Murbl (one of the creature's Tyrolean name) was often killed because "the fat from it was good for use" (possibly a mix-up with the marmot). And Carlo Amoretti wrote in 1814 that the animal was often found near Lake Como in Italy, but he suspected that it was just a European variety of the South American iguana. As far as its toxicity is concerned, according to a description from the canton of Ticino from 1835, it is probably the case that "when the common man talks about monsters, terrible snakes whose look, breath and stench are poisonous, about cow milkers and the like, they are only large and completely harmless lizards."

It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that people seriously

began to question whether the animal even existed. Supporters and opponents of the Tatzelwurm had heated discussions in natural history magazines, and their articles filled the columns of the "Schlern" of South Tyrol, Italy, and the German popular science magazine "Kosmos".
After an analysis of 80 detailed sighting reports that I had at the time (I now have a few more), I stated in my 1993 book "Trolle Yetis Tatzelwürmer" (p. 71):
"The Tatzelwurm is described as a reptile or salamander-like creature 30 centimetres to one meter long [one to three feet], with one, two or six pairs of paws, and sometimes without legs; It is sometimes scaly, sometimes hairy, the face resembles that of a snake, but in most cases is that of a mammal." (see also p. 79, where an even greater range and even more contradictions are pointed out).
In my more recent book on the animal ("Der Tatzelwurm", raetia 2020) I found the head described as flattened with ears / flattened with white spot / blunt / compressed / cat-like, but without ears, bristles on the head / very wide head / head like a small child / long pointed snout / like a snake. The colour was reported to have been dirty-white / grey and greenish / grey-black and yellow spots / brown-yellow with dark, round spots / greyish with yellow spots / like a trout / reddish and head shiny white, back spotted red. Of the feet and legs some said there were none, others saw two feet or four small paws. Generally they were said to be very small, but then one tatzelwurm front legs like a salamander, but 20 times larger.
The tail became "thicker towards the end", was a finger-long stubby tail or 15 cm long, it was pointed or had a blunt tip.
More than one third of all observations were reported in or close to water showing that the idea of the tatzelwurm to be an animal of the peaks, and stones, is not really correct.
Also surprising was the fact that, if you believe the eyewitness reports, remains of the tatzelwurm have often been found. There are over 80 reports in my files, starting in 1828 in Solothurn with finds at the Katzenstein in 1894, at the Eppan ice holes in Italy, the electronic power station at Reichenbach in Switzerland and at Blinbach in Tyrol, Austria. Whenever the remains were preserved and investigated by a competent zoologist, they proved to be something already known, from a hellbender at Munich (escaped from the zoo) to antlers in Austria which caused a panic when hidden under fresh snow. Only in those cases where the remains were lost in fires, or eaten by other ani-

-mals is there any doubt as to what they were, such as the 1.5 m (5 ft) skeleton found in the upper Murtal before 1931 or when a hunter shot a tatzelwurm "to shreds" near Puchenstuben in Lower Austria in 1850. In 1781, the surgeon Wattmann of Ebensee stumbled across a "skeletons of a shot, 5 shoe long lizard (with the head of a goat, a heavy tail, 4 feet, without ears, fat like a 3 year old child, brownish black, and belly spotted white with 3/4 inch long, thin, piercing hair." It was not preserved.

The many, often contradictory reports resulted in a kind of phantom image of the animal we are looking for: depending on the region, it was known by a variety of names, including haselwurm, murbl, bergstutz, springworm, basilisk, gatto serpente and of course tatzelwurm or tazzelwurm. As variable as the names is the animal itself, a true proteus: The lizard's body had a stubby tail, a newt, lizard or cat's head, one, two or more pairs of legs, was scaly, with warty skin or with short bristles on the neck. Sometimes the animal hastily fled into the leaves when a herdsman found it, but it was often described as aggressive and poisonous. As soon as a tatzelwurm saw an eyewitness, it jumped at him from several meters away, with a piecing whistle. The length was thought to be around 7 ft 200 years ago, modern descriptions, however, consistently gave the Tatzelwurm a maximum size of 50 cm; on average, the animals observed measured just 30 cm in the last 100 years. This was in contrast to previous reports, which described the creature as being five feet or longer. Skeletons and slain worms were also only reported in the past. Around 80 dead tatzelwurms are known, but not a single remain can still be traced today. Proponents even gave the phantom creature an impeccable scientific name, *Heloderma europaeum*, or European crusted lizard. According to over 500 eyewitness reports, the animal was once widespread in Bavaria, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and even France.

Sometimes, adventurers set out to hunt a specimen or at least photograph it in order to finally identify the animal. The Natural Research Society of Berne had already offered a reward of 4 Louis d'or for a dead stollenwurm in 1810, but no hunter ever claimed the money. In 1934, the popular "Berliner Illustrirte" organized an expedition to the Bernese Oberland, where a tatzelwurm had recently been photographed, but it did not find the animal and was only able to collect additional eyewitness reports. Then in 1933 the Loch Ness Monster appeared in the newspapers for the first time, overshadowing the fame of the tatzelwurm in the countries around the Alps. Today it is only

known by name, perhaps as a joke, but no longer as a real – or at least possible – being.
However – huge lizards, menacing and scary, are still reported in the Alps, mainly in Italy. Once again his appearance seems to change – from the large newt or lizard to something that could have come out of Steven Spielberg's Jurassic Park as the creature sighted in July 2009 Valtellina – this time the reptile walked upright. An agricultural science student explained: "I wasn't dreaming. It approached me on its hind legs, its front legs were small. It resembled a prehistoric velociraptor. It was almost a meter high with its head and was probably one and a half or two meters long."
On September 28, 2009 at 2:30 p.m., an astonished Giovanni Pianezzola saw a "large reptile," one meter long and brown, in the garden of his house near Vallonara. It quickly hurried across the lawn and disappeared into the nearby Longhella stream. The man thought the animal was an alligator. But he kept quiet about his observation until he read about another sighting (or did he make it up after others reported a monster?)
In October 2009, an anonymous eyewitness called the "Giornale di Vicenza". He described seeing a "monitor lizard", an "iguana" or a "caiman" in the Longhella stream between between Morostica and Vallonara on both October 4th and 5th. It was around a meter long; the ducks had disappeared from the stream shortly before. At first he blamed a large carp but now thought it could be the reptile. As is often the case in such cases, a day-long police search for the animal was unsuccessful.
The police were looking for an escaped crocodile. But the villagers knew better: There was no reason to panic. It was just the "cat snake" and they know it well. It is harmless, and a snake with the head of a cat.
So sightings continue to this day, most of all in the Italian Alps.

Austrian newspaper account of the Tatzelwurm

Provided by Loes Modderman

ANNO, Allgemeiner Tiroler Anzeiger, 1935-07-18, Seite 4 (onb.ac.at)

The discussion on the Tatzelwurm, which in geological circles never totally died out, has shortly also come to the attention of a bigger audience, through the alleged authentical picture in the *Berliner Illustierte Zeitung* , with a challenge to catch one of these animals, dead or alive, for a considerable reward.

Literature on the Tatzelwurm is plentiful, and in the Alpen region there still are many people who can testify to its existence.

The Tatzelwurm, also is called *Springwurm, Giftwurm* or *Bergstuss* (because of its remarkable short tail) , is called *Stollenwurm* in Switzerland, and should not be confused with the *Lindwurm* and other purely mythological creatures.

It is a rather small animal, 60cm to 1m long, and about 20cm thick.

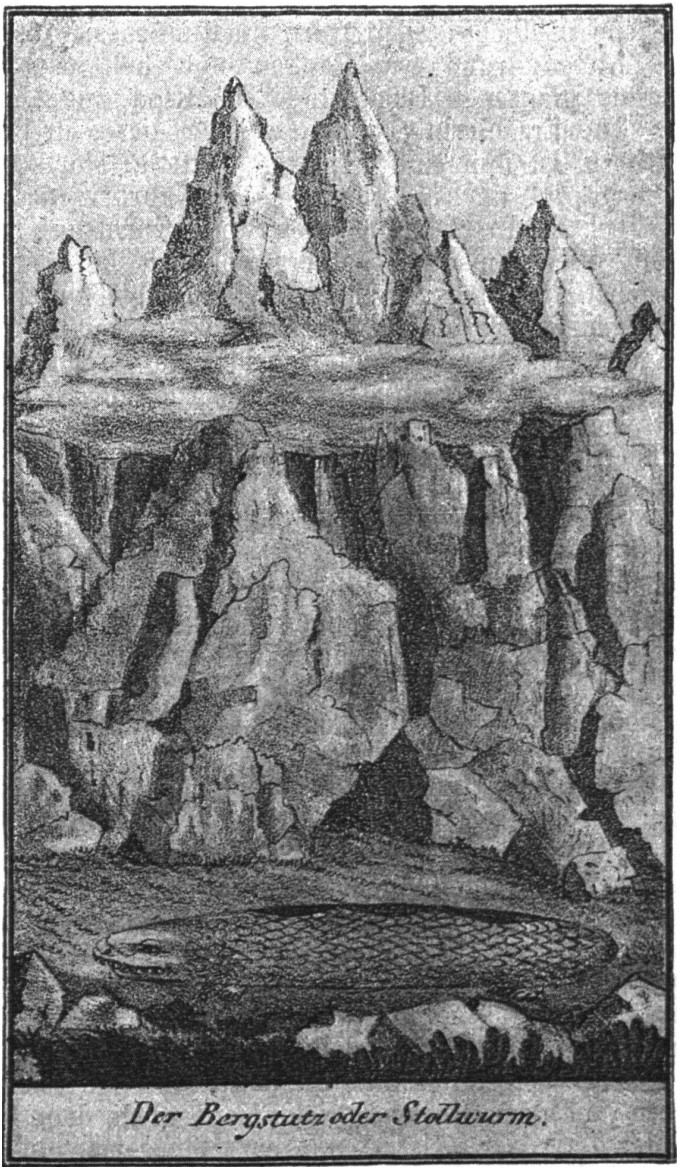
The descriptions in books and drawings go back for centuries, and they show how different the witnesses have perceived the animal. Mostly the mythological aspects of the animal prevail in these texts, like the deadly poisonous breath and the hunting of people.
But it can't be dismissed that the animal attacks people when it feels threatened, and that its bite can be lethal.
Although there are a lot of similarities in the descriptions, there seem to be two definite types.
One of them is hairy or with scales, grey or brown, with small or no ears, small teeth, small but penetrating eyes, a head like a marten, short and stumpy forelegs and no or very short hindlegs. A short and stumpy tail is often described too.
The animal is likely to pounce on you, hissing, which makes a precise observation difficult. The other kind is described rather the same, but that one has lighter or even no hair at all. Both kinds live in rocky places of 2000m or higher er, and they are never seen in open terrain.

When startled, they hide immediately behind the rocks.
Skeptics argue that creatures of this size would have been discovered already, or at least trails or dead animals would have been found. Others point to the fact that the Alps are a big place and in less inhabited regions it happens that new animals living there are not discovered for a long time.

The writer then refers to Nessie, and tells about the many propositions about its identity that have been forwarded. And he goes on about the many animals that were once plentiful and now extinct, and how little is known about many animals that might have once lived. To make his point he uses a lot of words!
Then he talks about zoologists who write that the animal once lived but is now extinct. Others are sure that the Tatzelwurm is in fact another, well known, animal, like an otter, or the horn viper.
And he warns against conclusions that can't be confirmed by science, yet.
But he himself sees a point in the Fish otter, who likes to wander around, but always returns to the water, which would explain the lack of dead bodies. His appearance is not that different from what Tatzelwurm witnesses say they saw.

After a lengthy exposé that's not very interesting the writer goes on to tell us that his own idea is that the Tatzelwurm is an underground species, that only comes out at night. He points to the fact that the Alps are riddled with caves. The body of the animal could point to living in confined spaces, wriggling his way between rocks and narrow obstacles. Underground there would be plenty to eat too for the elusive critter. It would explain why observations are so rare nowadays.
In his conclusion the writer states that the amount of animals living underground is far bigger than of those living in the daylight. And he refers to the finds a recent expedition made to the rainforests of Cameroon, where surprising animals were found underground.

Stollenwurm or Bergstuz. Dalla Torre, Karl Wilhelm von (1887). "Die Drachensage im Alpengebiet". *Zeitschrift des deutschen und oesterreichischen* Alpenvereins 18: 217. 1887 Wikipedia Creative Commons



The Tatzelwurm in Issue 2 of Animals and Men

Animals & Men Issue Two

Alpine Enigma

by Roger Hutchings

My earliest encounter with the subject known as cryptozoology took place sixty years ago in Paris. In 1934 I was an expatriate teenager washing dishes in the resteraunt kitchen at *Le Dome* in the *Boulevard Montparnasse*. During the afternoon b reak between lunch and dinner service I often used to visit the nearby Natural History Museum, outside which a vociferous old gentleman was wont to parade bearing a sandwich board proclaiming that **THERE ARE BIPED LIZARDS IN THE ALPS!**

In conversation with him I learnt that despite a mass of witnessed evidence presented to the authorities over many years his claim had been persistently dismissed, and his demonstration was in protest at the official denial of the facts as known to him. His name was **Maurice Masse,** born and bred in the Alps of Provence where he asserted that biped lizards were commonplace, as they were throughout the Alpine region spreading through Switzerland and southern Bavaria and into Austria.

He corrected my initial presumption that the creatures moved upright on hind legs by explaining that they possessed only forelegs, despite which they moved swiftly when observed, to vanish from sight into rocky retreats in the mountain heights where they dwelt. He also told me that where he came from, in the sparsely inhabited countryside of Upper Provence, they were taken for granted and that all his neighbours could affirm their reality, as accepted by his and their forebears for generations past. He added that other forelegged species found in Central America, at a comparable latitude, were scientifically accepted, and in his opinion they confirmed yet another significant link with the lost continent of Atlantis.

My abiding curiosity about unrecognised creatures learnt nothing further about these Alpine lizards until reading Bernard Heuvelmans' *"On the Track of Unknown Animals"* (originally published in French in 1955 and in English in 1958). This described a *"stumpy lizard at least two to three feet long"* living in The Alps and frequently encountered but never captured to be classified scientifically. Recorded observers agreed that it was more or less cylindrical in shape with a wide mouth and large, round eyes. Those who had seen it at close quarters asserted that it had short forelegs but no hind legs at all. Heuvelmans devoted over four pages to the subject with reports and drawings from nineteenth century sources and a photograph said to have been taken in Switzerland in 1934.

In the German speaking Alps the creature is called various names including, notably *Bergstutzen, Stollenwurm* and *Tatzelwurm.* In the French Alps of Provence where I resided between 1964 and 1968, it was known to my neighbours as *'Le Gros'* (the big one), although some older folk said that their parents or grandparents used the patois name *"Arasas"*. Everyone loudly claimed to have seen it at least once, and those whose activities took them to the more solitary areas- shepherds, herb and truffle gatherers-referred to it with casual familiarity. They said that the creature could often be observed basking in sunlight close to holes or clefts in the rocks, into which it would vanish with lightning speed if disturbed. Those who

had viewed it briefly at close quarters described it in terms which closely echoed those quoted by Heuvelmans. I should add that none of my witnesses' reportswere the outcome of leading questions, and that certainly none of them were aware of the existence of Heuvelmans' book.

Readers who collect examples of Fortean "coincidence" may be interested to learn that amongst the Provencal witnesses was a lavender grower who found a "flying saucer" parked on his land in 1965. Two little beings with pointed chins, slit mouths and eyes that curved round the sides of their heads emerged and imobilised him by pointing a pencil-shaped instrument at him before retreating into their vehicle and ascending into the sky. His name was **Maurice Masse**, and in common with his namesake outside the Museum in Paris his story was dismissed by the scientific authorities. Of particular significance is the fact that before this experience he was entirely unaware of the worldwide UFO and extraterrestial phenomena. (For further details: **Flying Saucer Review 14:7).**

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Beast of Brunei Investigation

Josh Hughes

On the 11th of December, 2013, an image was posted to a website called Project Noah; a community where anyone can share photographs of wildlife, with the intention of having them identified by the various members, many of whom are experts.

However, on this day, one of the photos uploaded was different. The image was posted by a user known only as Hazwan, and the only information provided was a caption that read: "Someone caught this during fishing, what is this?"

In the photo, a bizarre creature lay in a white bucket. At first glance, it appears to be a crustacean of some kind, but as noted by the community, it lacked the sizeable number of limbs and dual pair of antennae typically associated with crustaceans." The abdominal pincers looked more akin to something you'd find on an insect, and as far as anyone on Project Noah was concerned, there was not really anything like this. Well, anything like this that was still alive.

One user suggested it may be a Radiodont. The problem was that they were extinct, and had been for at least 400 million years. These belonged to a group of arthropods from the Cambrian period, and pretty much dominated the oceans around that time. At first it sounds illogical, but this wouldn't be the first time a previously-thought-to-be-extinct species was found alive, as evidenced by the coelacanth, chacoan peccary, australian night parrot and many other discoveries within just the last century alone.

However, people didn't really have a lot of information to work with. There was only one photo and almost no details given. One thing Hazwan did include, however, were the geographical coordinates for where their friend had caught it. These turned out to be located in

Brunei; a country in southeast Asia situated on the northern coast of the island of Borneo (Bore Nioh). Using these coordinates, the creature in question was caught in an unidentified river somewhere near the coast. As a location, Brunei is not that well known, but this certainly wasn't the first time a strange creature was caught in Brunei. Even if that time was just a dead pufferfish…

While Hazwan himself didn't have a lot of information on the mystery beast, I don't think they were willingly hiding anything. I think it's important to note that they had previously posted on Project Noah, and as far as I can tell, they seemed genuine. They had asked the community about a plant they had found, and about a beetle, which, they claimed, was also sent to them by a friend, and both of which were fairly normal and native to the area.

They also responded to a comment from another member on Project Noah where they said "Sorry guys, thats the only info i get from my friend :/ the size, im not sure either, by looking at the picture and comparing it with the bucket.. maybe around less than 30cm? Sorry.. But im still curious about this creature".

Regardless, the lack of information was definitely suspicious. Why only one photo? Why couldn't his friend give him more details? And who took the photo in the first place?

THE INVESTIGATION

One reader on Project Noah reached out and suggested Hazwan send the image and details to a website called Whatsthatbug, which is similar to Project Noah but with a community specialising in identifying insects and other arthropods, usually with a high degree of success. One day later, on December 12, Hazwan uploaded it under the heading "Unknown thing caught while fishing in Brunei".

The website's owners reached out and actually responded to the post, saying "we don't even know where to begin to classify this thing". They asked several questions about how it was caught, how large it

was and if there were any additional photos but received no response from Hazwan.

It's here, from these posts, that Karl Shuker, a British zoologist and cryptozoologist, was first made aware of the photo after being sent them by fellow cryptozoologist Richard Muirhead (myoorhead), and subsequently Karl started his own investigation.

This was definitely not Karl's first rodeo with unidentified creatures, and has written dozens of books on them, including, as I found out while writing this, a few that I actually grew up reading myself.

In his post, TRILOBITE BEETLES, CETI EELS, AND THE BEAST OF BRUNEI, he notes how similar in appearance the Beast of Brunei is to the Trilobite beetle, as you can see here, and it's not too far off, at least visually. They also happen to be found in… South East Asia, which makes Brunei a plausible location to find one. The similarities end here though, Karl notes, with trilobite beetles only reaching around 6cm in adult females, and the pincers being a rather odd addition, stating that they were "much more reminiscent of the abdominal forceps of earwigs and other insects than of anything exhibited by a crustacean. Yet I am not familiar with any form of aquatic insect that is even vaguely similar in appearance to the Beast of Brunei."

He offered a few explanations,although nothing conclusive. Perhaps it was an undescribed species of Trilobite beetle, he mused, or perhaps it was just Photoshopped. It appeared that all hope in identifying the beast of Brunei was lost. But the answer, had been in plain sight the entire time, and as it turns out, had been on the original post.

STEFAN RYDEHED

Remember when I said there was only one known photo? Well, it turns out there are more. A lot more. All of them from varying angles, and of a higher quality than the one posted on Project Noah.

As you can see, there's a lot more information provided by this set of photographs, and the most important is not even the creature itself, but the location. It's clear from the foliage alone that these were not taken in Southeast Asia. So what was going on?

And even stranger, all of these photos were included with the original post, but that post was not the one made on Project Noah, it was made on Facebook, by a man named Stefan Rydehed.

Stefan Rydehed, who lives in Sweden, uploaded these images onto Facebook in 2013, months before the posting made by Hazwan. Stefan said on the post that it was actually caught in the Nissan River in Southwest Sweden. Within just a day of uploading the images, opinions flooded in from biologists, fisherman and other professionals, and the post received hundreds of likes. I believe that a friend of Hazwan saw this post, and sent one of the photos over to him, knowing that Hazwan had had success with identifying wildlife in the past using Project Noah. This doesn't take into account that he had also lied about catching it, to Hazwan, so perhaps it was just a joke. Either way, we may never know the full story behind the Hazwan upload on Project Noah.

So, who was Stefan Rydehed? Stefan is a short film writer and director from Halmstad in Sweden, having made a few documentaries and horror films. After seeing the Facebook post, a reporter from the local newspaper named Kenny Hero, reached out to Stefan for an interview, and he accepted.

In the interview, Stefan revealed it all. He said that if people had just clicked on his Facebook profile, they would have seen the answer straight away. The images he uploaded show that he was not only a professional filmmaker, but a hobbyist model maker. He told the newspaper that he had built it in an hour from old plastic cookie tins and some electrical cords, just out of pure boredom, and then decided to upload it as if it were real. When asked why, he said "When talking about old folk beliefs, people laugh at how in the past you could be-

-lieve in witches and goblins. I wanted to test how difficult it was to get people to believe in something similar even today". It turns out it's not very difficult at all.

So I actually reached out to several people in this story, and right before I finished the video, they very kindly got back to me. One of them was Richard Muirhead, the cryptozoologist that sent the Project Noah post to Karl Shuker, who confirmed a lot of the details in this video but unfortunately couldn't find the original Facebook post or the identity of Hazwan. And the other person I spoke to was Stefan Rydehed, who had no idea of the widespread influence of his original upload, and had never even heard of the term 'The Beast of Brunei'.

The original model still sat in his barn, and he even sent me a photo of what the beast looks like today.

Stefan said that the original post he made was now deleted, but explained that he had simply uploaded the images to his personal Facebook feed, to prank his friend who was a fisherman. So from here, his friend most likely posted it to a Facebook group of fishermen, who in turn posted it to other groups, with this being spread so fast that Stefan told me that within just one day, he had radio and newspaper journalists contacting him. Stefan, who himself had extensively studied folklore, had started an urban legend without even knowing.

People want to believe in the extraordinary at any cost, even if that means ignoring every red flag. And I think that's why people who are interested in cryptozoology and the supernatural still hold onto those beliefs. Every year that goes by, it can get harder and harder to believe those things. Technology gets better, and the evidence often gets worse. And with every year that we grow older we lose that magic more and more, the excitement that perhaps we don't know everything. I look back at those books I would read growing up, and I remember how it felt reading those tales of giant monsters and supernatural encounters, how they shaped me. And I think clinging to the hope that there might be something special out there, is not just about

what we read or learned as a child, but that it reminds us of being one. And any chance to recapture that child-like wonder is a chance worth taking, I think.

“He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.”

- Albert Einstein

The Glacier Frog

Ulrich Magin

The last issue of Flying Snake included pieces on giant toads and mystery amphibians. I can add the glacier frog. It is true that the African goliath frog (*Conraua goliath*), discovered in the Cameroons in 1905, is considered to be the largest frog species in the world. Its length is 40 centimetres from the head to the tip of the body, and 60 to 80 centimetres with the legs extended. The largest toad in the world is the South American cane toad (*Rhinella marina*, syn.: *Bufo marinus*), which grows up to 22 centimetres long

The glacier frog allegedly tops them all. I first crossed its tracks when reading the book "Menschenwege–Götterberge: Bilder meiner Reisen" by German explorer Herbert Tichy (Wollzeilen Verlag 1960, p. 93):

"There was a second reason to justify mountaineering in the Chitral. The abominable Snowman of the Himalayas is unknown there, but they know the 'glacier frog' which grows to the size of a calf and lives in crevasses. It is not exactly common, but some men claim to have seen it and say that its skin – similar to that of a mythical Indian cobra – is covered in gold and diamonds. In the remote towns of Chitral it was useless for me to deny that I had come to catch a glacier frog."

The oldest reference I've encountered seems to be the "The Himalayan Journal" (Oxford University Press 1929, p. 72) which gibes a somewhat more restraint size for the animal:

"The glacier frog, which I believe exists, is reported to have been seen by many shikaris and others who have had occasion to visit the higher moraines. A modest estimate of its size from the evidence of these witnesses is about twelve inches long."

Interestingly, the next paragraph deals with the jinn:

“Finally there are the jins, who though much more in evidence in the olden days before the British Raj, may be said to die a hard death. They choose old deserted dwellings to live in, the larger the dwelling, the larger the jin that may be expected to emerge. They have a disconcerting habit of assuming the guise of a dog or a cow until they are within a few feet of the unsuspecting traveller. They then disclose their frightful reality and the unfortunate who gets away with a withered arm or a mouth twisted almost to the back of his head is indeed lucky. Many become hopeless idiots for the rest of their lives.”

But back to the giant amphibian – “The Cornhill Magazine” had more on the creature in its vol. 158, 1938, p. 840, which seems to have been Tichy’s source (if he had not heard it from the locals). The author is Capt. E. H. W. COBB, R.E., the article headlined “Polo and Brown Trout”:

“Where India's northernmost boundary threads its way among the mighty peaks and glaciers of the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush, there lies that fascinating little country called Chitral. Away beyond it to the north is the cradle of the Oxus River in the high Pamirs. Northwards, too, are those far-away places, Samarkand, Kashgar and Yarkand, in their stony plains on the ‘roof of the world’. Their names seem almost legendary, and of a surety it is their distance that has lent them most of their enchantment. But for the sportsman at any rate Chitral is a veritable little Paradise. Its more inaccessible recesses teem with ibex and markhor, red bear and snow leopard; while the deep valleys are full of that splendid little game-bird, the chikor. It is a country which the Creator has fashioned in true ‘perpendicular’ style. At its centre Tirich Mir raises its lofty knife-edges to 26,550 feet, hitherto unclimbed by man and peopled by the local inhabitants with whole armies of picturesque fairies, some good, and some bad. Its crevasses, too, to them, are denizened by the dreaded ‘boghazoo,’ the glacier-frog which grows to the size of a small cow and preys on any luckless mortal rash enough to violate its hidden sanctuaries.”

So if you go hunting for the glacier-frog, you better bring a steel net!

The Graptolite Fossils Helen Samuels

We can discover a myriad of the weirdest creatures by looking into the fossil record.

One of the first people to examine the graptolites was the taxonomer, Carolus (Carl) Linnaeus, who recognised the genus *Graptolithus* in 1735, but did not know what type of organism they were. Their Latin name describes what they looked like to early scientists - “writing on the rocks”; “grapto” meaning writing and “lithus” meaning rocks.

Fig. 1. Fossil graptolites. *Cryptograptus* from the Silurian of South America. Wikipedia

File:*Didymograptus bifidus*.jpg - Wikimedia Commons

Graptolites are the fossil remains of colonies of individual small animals, called "zooids" which lived in the oceans of the Cambrian to Carboniferous periods 520 million to 350 million years before present.

Each of the fossil graptolites shown in the photos is about 2 cm long and shows the imprint or remineralised remains left in the rocks by the hard outer casing of the colony.

But how did the fossil graptolites get into the rocks in the first place?

Sea creatures sink with sediments onto the sea floors when they die, and sometimes the bodies of those dead organisms are preserved within the sediments which accumulate at the same time. If chemical and physical conditions are right, the organisms may be preserved when sediments later turn to rock as they get progressively buried under kilometres of material deposited on top of them. The pressure upon them from overlying material, forces minerals to move through and crystallise in the sediments and rocks and this may affect and enhance the preservation of certain fossils. So, graptolites, which may have been either free-floating or attached to the sea floor, died and

and were buried and their imprints remain in fine grained oceanic sediments.

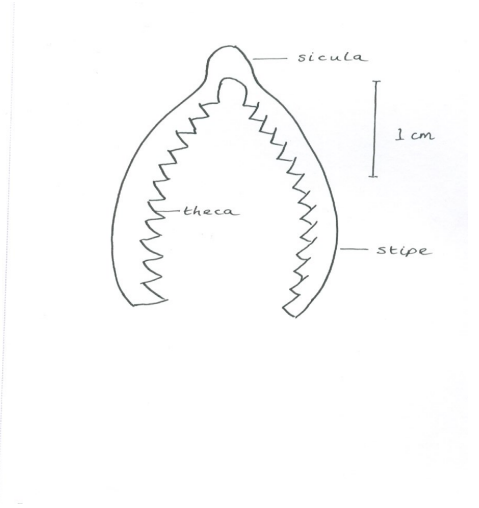


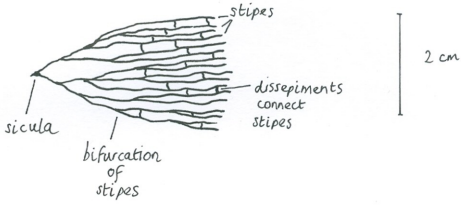
Fig 3. *Didymograptus,* a tuning fork-shaped graptolite which floated in the ocean during the Ordovician, around 500 million years before present.

The sicula was the first vessel occupied by an initial zooid and the stipes are long strips of thecae, each one containing one zooid, which are attached to each other and develop laterally one by one, away from the sicula. The whole graptolite colony is called the rhabdosome.

Rhabdosomes are found in many shapes and sizes. Dendroid graptolites, for example, have rhabdosomes in a bush-like form and at first glance, look like plants. However, they are also colonies of tiny zooids. *Dictyonema* is an example of a dendroid graptolite.

Fig 4. *Dictyonema* was a bush-shaped dendroid graptolite, which would have been attached to the sea floor. The stipes comprising

thecae, in which the zooids lived, were attached laterally to each other, forming a bush shape.



In dendroid graptolites, many stipes emerge from the sicula, and branch, or bifurcate, into further stipes. The stipes are connected by dissepiments, which help to hold the rhabdosome together.

Zooids lived in a series of interconnected tubes, connected in branches comprising the colony. These colonies were sometimes attached to floating material which kept them at the correct depth to access the available food resources to which a particular graptolite species had become adapted.

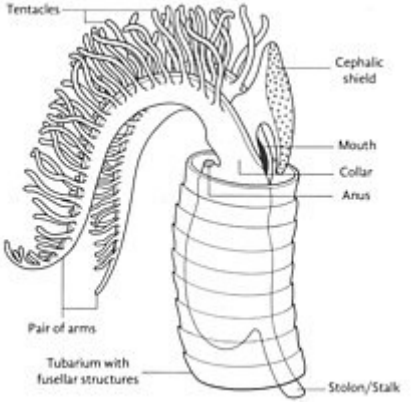
The first graptolites lived on the seabed where they would attach to materials to anchor themselves in place, but later forms floated in the upper parts of the sea, where they could make use of the quantities of food available there in the form of single celled organisms. Through natural selection, numerous forms of graptolite developed, producing an array of fossil forms which are very useful for geologically dating rock strata because many evolved and became extinct over specific periods of time and can be traced over large geographical areas in fine grained oceanic sediments.

The organism *Rhabdopleura* is an ancient genus of living hemichordates, from the Middle Cambrian period, which is related to both

echinoderms and chordates and lives on the sea floor in colonies, in a similar way to the extinct dendroid graptolites. *Rhabdopleura* is thought to be a currently living graptolite (Mitchell *et al*, 2013) and has a fossil record back to the Cambrian era (about 500 million years ago).

Rhabdopleura, a living graptolite relation. Wikipedia

The zooids, or individual animals, making up the colony of the graptolite, were filter feeders, straining out suspended plankton. The anus and mouth were both at one end of the organism, and the tentacles protruded from the top of the theca, in which the zooid was protected.



Graptolite zooid. Wikipedia

You can find fossil dendroid graptolites in the 500-million-year-old rocks of the Palaeozoic of North- West England, Wales and Scotland They are also found in younger Carboniferous rocks (300 million years old) and free - floating graptolite fossils are common in Ordovician and Silurian mudstone and shales. If you want to find graptolite fossils in the rocks for yourself, you can travel to Abereiddy Bay, Pembrokeshire, but do not attempt to hammer them out of the cliff, as this is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. You should be able to find eroded stones on the shore, which have clear graptolite fossils in them and large numbers of well-preserved fossils in the cliff faces.

And I may well see you there this summer!

Helen Samuels BSc MPhil FGS

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Notes & Queries

"Hairy Man" of The Mountains
Welsh Shepherds` Chase and Capture
The Daily Citizen June 27th 1914

The residents of Lleder Valley and the inhabitants of Dolwyddelen (Carnarvon) have been very much disturbed by strange manifestations on the adjoining mountains where, it was reported, the shepherds had seen a diminutive hairy man skipping from rock to rock and emitting strange sounds. The disappearance of fowls and fruit was associated with the strange visitor, and it was decided to promote a party to hunt the mysterious being and, if possible, to imprison it. The shepherds joined in the chase , and the adjoining mountains were carefully searched without result until the party reached the vicinity of Penmachno.

Here Shepherd John Roberts of Talargerwin, was startled by a strange cry which came from behind a rock he was passing.

Looking over he saw a strange animal, and struck it with his stick, rendering it insensible. It was then discovered that the "hairy man" was a monkey, escaped probably from some private "Zoo."

Wild cat in Ireland (1)

Lloyd`s Weekly Newspaper
January 16th 1910

What is stated to be a wild cat attacked a man in Cahercoon (?) Wood ,Ireland and seriously wounded him in the face.

Wild cat in Ireland (2)

The Sphere January 5th 1963

County Sligo described as the last refuge of the wild cat in Ireland.

Earthquakes and Oarfish

Horror as 'earthquake omen' fish washes up on beach leaving locals terrified - World News -

www.mirror.co.uk

The oarfish – dubbed a "harbinger of doom" – measured 13 feet (4 metres) in length and was still alive when beachgoers tried to help it back out to sea at Cancas Beach in Punta Sal, Peru

On July 25th 2023 a large oarfish was washed a shore at Cancas Beach, in Punta Sal, Peru. "Beachgoers panicked after a huge fish - believed to appear from the sea when an earthquake is looming - washed up on the sand yesterday. The enormous deep-sea oarfish - which measured 13 feet (4 metres) in length - is dubbed a "harbinger of doom" for its links to disasters."

The Omagh hum

I paper November 15th 2023

Search is on for source of mystery Omagh `hum`

" A persistent humming noise is causing sleepless nights for residents in County Tyrone, with officials scrambling to find the source of the mystery sound. Reports of the noise first surfaced in Omagh last month but have since spread all over the county…"

Re-discovery of Attenborough`s echidna in Indonesia

The Times November 10th 2023

"For weeks the Oxford University scientists trekked through steep jungle, enduring leeches, malaria and a broken arm, in pursuit of a mysterious creature...They had come to Papua to find the Sir David`s long-beaked echidna, which was named after Sir David Attenborough and documented only once before in 1961. It had long been feared extinct. It looked as though they had failed, until a last-ditch attempt up a mountain yielded something rather spectacular: footage of the echidna, proving it survives…"

Pygmy crocodiles in Northern Ethiopia

Arabian Sands by Wilfred Thesiger (1st published in 1959)page 15

Pygmy crocodiles in a salt lake in Abhe bad Northern Ethiopia near the border with Djibouti.

A Sea monster near Liverpool in 1931

BILK July 2021

To go alongside the Merseyside mermaid, this is from the Manawatu Standard, 20 July 1931: "HUGE SEA MONSTER, DISCOVERY NEAR LIVERPOOL. A sea monster 12ft long and 7ft in girth, with a shark`s tail and a whale`s head, has been washed ashore at Fleetwood, on the west coast of England, north of Liverpool. The remains of a giant fish were still gripped in the monster`s jaws. The scientists are puzzled."

An albino platypus

Unique white Platypus found in Aussie creek prompts conservation concerns

Discovery of an extremely rare white platypus in Northern NSW has raised urgent calls for more substantial conservation efforts in Australia.

www.news.com.au November 6th 2023

In 1799, when British scientists first received a platypus specimen with its duck-like bill and ability to lay eggs, they suspected it was a hoax, describing it as "some deceptive preparation by artificial means," according to zoologist George Shaw.

Fast forward to the present day, and researchers from the University of New England have made an "extraordinary" discovery – a white-coloured platypus, offering undeniable proof of its existence.

Over 28 months, the team documented multiple observations, with photographs and video footage of the specimen swimming in a creek in New South Wales' Northern Tablelands...

Strange fish

Morning Post August 11th 1801

The fishermen of Nice have lately found a *strange fish*, neither *black* nor *white* , with two *horns,* We hope none of our *brown tanned cits* have been lost at our watering places.

I don`t know what brown tanned cits refers to, perhaps it is an "in-joke" long lost in the sands of time.

Black foxes as mystery cats

Thanks to Jane Muirhead

Daily Mail online September 2nd 2023

According to former zoo keeper Hayley de Ronde, mystery British big black cats are actually black foxes. She "says that the cat-like behaviour of the canine could hold the key to sightings across the country. The number of the rare melanomistic (sic) foxes is growing in the UK as they breed with regular red foxes…"

×

Apparently de Ronde believes that there are "over 400 black foxes roaming the streets and countryside" (See **www.ladbible.com September 5th 2023**)

De Ronde is founder of Black Foxes UK and is intent on educating the public about this relatively rare species.

Mystery black cat in Macclesfield

Thanks to Bob Skinner

Bob Skinner passed on the following story to me in December 2023: He found it on the Big Cat Sightings Anywhere Facebook group and it mentioned that a large black cat carrying a squirrel in its mouth had been seen in Macclesfield Cemetery. I do not know the exact date.

Dog swallows a huge amount of toads

Thanks to Bob Skinner

"Varieties" Leicester Chronicle March 26th 1825

Dog Vomits Up 13 living toads

" We have been informed, from a very credible source, that a dog, the property of a person residing at William street , Morier-town Devonport, on Monday last, vomited 13 living toads!! eleven of which were small , and 2 nearly full grown. This circumstance created a considerable degree of curiosity, and the house in which the dog was confined was beset by crowds of persons. Our informant observed that the dog had been accustomed to prowl about the meadows and rivers adjoining the town. " - *Devonshire Freeholders.*

Happy little mouse in a happy little house (or was it a shed?)

Mouse filmed tidying up man's shed every night

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-67902966

January 8th 2024

Despite being an avid wildlife photographer, retired postman Rodney Holbrook never expected to capture a Ratatouille-style scene unfolding in his own shed. After regularly discovering that things from the night before had been mysteriously tidied, he set up a night vision camera on his workbench. The 75-year-old from Builth Wells, Powys, said the tidying ritual had been going on for two months…"

Crocodiles in Happy Valley Hong Kong

The narrator on the documentary about Hong Kong wildlife, Land of Dragons (1989) mentioned that before there was a race course in Happy Valley, Hong Kong island, it was a swamp with crocodiles in it.

Can green eyes ever turn blue?

I have in my possession an exercise book from a project at my primary school in Hong Kong, Peak School, from 1972 when I was five years old. In this exercise book I make the comment that " I have green eyes." Now for as long as I can remember I have actually had *blue* eyes. Certainly now at the age of fifty-seven I have blue eyes. Also although five years old is very young it is surely old enough to tell the difference between green and blue! So what is going on here? According to a web site I found, The Eye Doctors:

" For most people, eye color will not change significantly past infancy. If you notice a change in your eye color, set an appointment with an eye doctor to help find the cause. If it's a major change that happens suddenly, ask for an urgent appointment. " (1)

The point I am trying to make is that my eye colour did change after infancy and from the age of nine I have had to wear glasses. I wonder if any Flying Snake readers have had similar experiences with their eyes?

Concerning the egg of a squid

Diver discovers `alien egg` as long as a human leg

Metro January 17th 2024

This piece is not strictly cryptozoology but I found it very interesting nevertheless: " A diver found an `alien slinky-like` squid egg—as long as a human leg. "

A bird with two heads (1)

Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough
April 27th 1934

A small bird with two fully-developed heads has been seen at the village of Trollamala near Karlscrona. One head is in the usual place, with the other grown out of the side of the neck.

While feeding, the bird uses the normal head—the other appears to keep a sharp look out for intruders.—Reuter.

A bird with two heads (2)

Dundee Courier
October 22nd 1952

A double-headed thrush is reported from the Kirkby Lonsdale area of South Westmorland. Colonel O.A.. Chaldecott , of Summerfield, Kirkby Lonsdale said " I have seen the bird on my lawn several times. The thrush had two distinct heads."

Letters to Fate

Thanks to the late Gary Mangiacopra

MILLARDS TO THE RESCUE

THIS STORY is told by Mr. and Mrs. Waldo Grose who lived at the intersection of Book Hill and River Road near Deep River, Connecticut.

The Grose home overlooks the Falls River mill pond and on the last day of January they saw that one of the swans that visit the pond had been frozen into the ice. The bird was unable to get out of the ice and it even looked to the Groses as if an icicle hung from its bill.

But before the Groses had time to figure out how to save the creature, a flock of 50 to 60 mallards and black ducks that had been sheltering in the woods, came out onto the ice in a body.

First they clustered on one side of the beleaguered swan and began bouncing up and down on the ice until it broke through. Then they waddled around to the other side of the swan and broke the ice there. Then they freed the swan front and back. Within a minute the graceful bird was swimming in a patch of open water 25 by 50 feet.

At this point it showed its gratitude in true swan fashion by driving off its rescuers.

ANCIENT ALASKAN VILLAGE

Mercedes B. Matter
Jackson, Montana

I have heard that an ancient village is located not far from Ketchikan Alaska. I believe I am the only person alive who has heard of this place. It was discovered by an old prospector who, after falling off a clump of rock and examining the place where he fell, discovered it was a man-made pyramid. The valley reportedly contains man-made canals and on the hill were said to be ruins. I know the close area in which the ruins are situated.

Do you know of any persons or institutions who would be interested enough to investigate? I would appreciate having them contact me.

I have visited a spot not too many miles from this alleged secret location where a homesteader, while plowing a small beach area for a garden patch, discovered all sorts of artifacts (crude designs).

ANOTHER TALKING DOG

Fred L. Ashworth
Heuvelton, New York

I was interested in the talking dog mentioned in "Report From the Readers" in the May, 1962, issue.

In 1922 Miss Laura M. Saunders of Ottawa, Canada, had a little black spaniel she had rescued and kept. He learned to pronounce the words "jes' a crumb" very plainly after many ineffectual attempts during which he made terrific noises in his throat while sitting up to beg. He finally found that, by rolling his tongue up over his nose, he could speak the words more distinctly. when very excited he repeated the last two words several times. He was an old dog when he learned his new trick.

INSIDE THE CRYSTAL SKULL

W. M. Smith
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The article, "Crystal Skull of Doom," by John Sinclair, in the March, 1962, issue was very interesting from quite a few different points of view.

If the picture accompanying the article is correct than this skull does not represent a skull of the Mayan Indian. The statement that priests worked on the skull for 150 years is absurd. Also the statement that the skull is 3,000 years old is based on a wild guess and on the circumstantial evidence of it being found in a grave which might be that old. It seems to me that the skull already might have been thousands of years old when it was put in the grave.

The interesting feature of the skull is that apparently it has within it a temperature supply and regulator. It is unbelievable that science tor. It is unbelievable that science did not find the skull interesting enough to take a closer look into it. If the energy is supplied from within, the source surpasses everything we have today. If the energy is supplied from without, then the skull acts as an energy transmitter.

X-ray examination of the skull might reveal some interesting data. Study of the crystal structure of the skull might help in solving the mystery. I hope that some organization will buy the skull, undertake the study of it, and inform the public of the findings.

FLOATING -- OR DREAMING

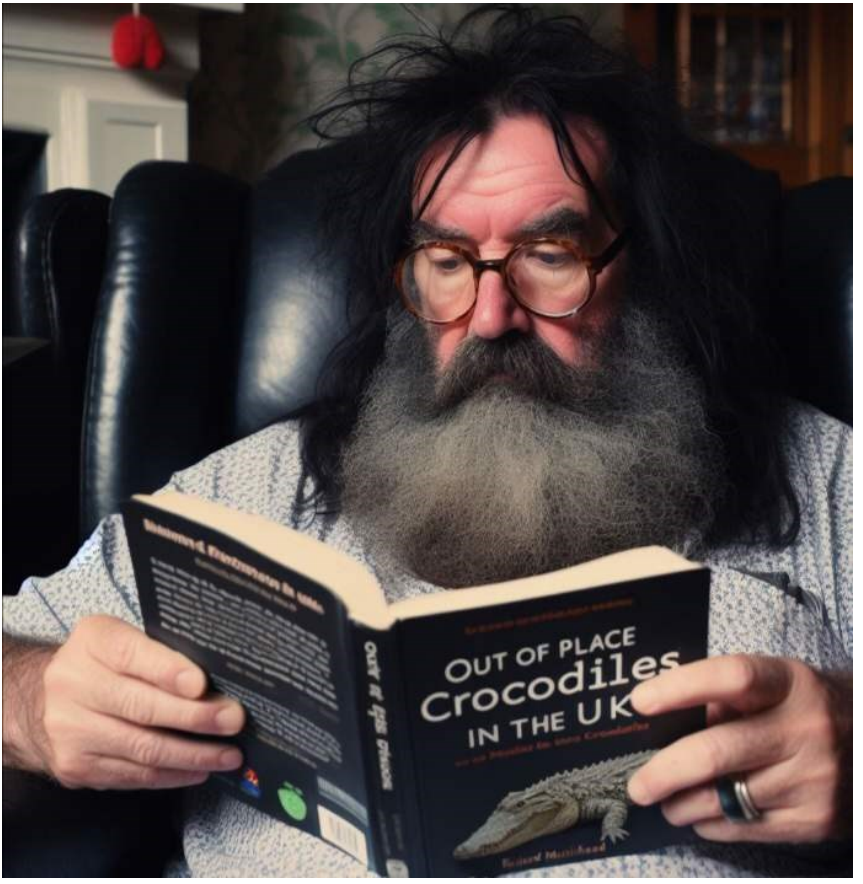
Mrs. Patricia Verdugo
Lawndale, California

In the March, 1962, issue I read the letter by Mr. Frank Sudlow of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, in which he stated that he experienced a strange happening which he could not explain. He stated that he floated up near the ceiling of his bedroom, and that he felt comfortable and light. My theory is that he was dreaming.

I experienced the same dream about two months ago. I have the habit of returning to bed after I get my husband off to work, and this particular morning I dreamed that I arose from my bed while lying on my back, then floated into the hallway and into my two-and-a-half year-old son's room, and then floated around his ceiling.

In the dream I thought to myself, "What was he going to tell his father that night about seeing his mother float around his ceiling?" He said nothing to indicate that I actually had done so, and I must assume it was a dream.

Since I was a small child I often have dreamed I was walking on air, and in these dreams it seemed quite normal for me to do this. It never was an unpleasant experience and I look forward to my next dream.



Look out for Richard Muirhead`s new book due out in 2024 or 2025`The Out of Place Crocodiles in the British Isles` from CFZ Press. Here is an image created by Bob Skinner using AI, imagining Jon Downes of the CFZ reading the book. © Bob Skinner using Bing Image Creator.